DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 082 RC 020 772

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TITLE Women's Literacy and Empowerment.
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Distance Education; *Educational Development; *Educational Needs; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Employed Women; *Empowerment; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Job Training; *Literacy Education; Rural Education; *Rural Women; Social Problems; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Vietnam

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses initiatives of the Vietnamese government to address the educational and training needs of the working population, particularly women. Since 1986, the Vietnamese government has initiated efforts to develop a multisectoral, market-oriented economy. Education and training are considered to be essential for promoting long-term national development. Thus, the government has focused on the development of higher education and the provision of basic education to working people, especially rural women. The current population of Vietnam is 73 million, including 20 million working women between the ages of 15-55. Seventy-five percent of working women are farmers who play a major role in food production. However, Vietnamese women particularly in rural areas, face many difficulties: unemployment, underemployment, poverty, lack of knowledge and experience in a market economy, and a high rate of illiteracy. Approximately 5.6 million women are illiterate, 89 percent of whom live in rural areas. Since 1990, the government has implemented literacy programs with the goal of raising literacy rates for people aged 15-35. Follow-up literacy courses focus on functional literacy and address such issues as environmental protection, drug abuse and AIDS prevention, child rearing, small business management, and cultural preservation. In addition, job skill training and distance education have been integrated to further meet the educational and training needs of women. The government believes that the education of women will result in effective parenting skills, lowering the school dropout rate, and cultural preservation. The significant number of female teachers at all levels of education illustrates the success of the government's efforts to promote the education of women. (LP)

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WOMEN'S LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Since 1986, Vietnam has launched its open-door policy and developed a multi-sectoral, market-oriented economy.

To provide fundamental and sustainable resources for the long-term national development, the Vietnamese Government considers education and training as its state policy of prime importance.

The goal of the policy is to provide favourable conditions for the nation to catch up with the advances of the world in such areas as sciences, technology and humanities, while sustaining and developing the cultural traditions and the national identity.

Along with the development of higher education (graduate and post-graduate levels), the Government pays great attention to providing basic education to the working people, especially women, to raise their capabilities.

2. The total population of Vietnam is now 73 million, including 20 million working women of the 15-55 age bracket, 75% of them farmers.

The Vietnamese women have made great contributions to national defense and re-construction. Hundreds of women have been entitled as "heroines" and thousands of old women as "Heroic Vietnamese Mothers". Quite a large number of Vietnamese women have recorded high achievements in science and technology at home and abroad ... Today, women form the principal workforce in the rural areas and play a major role in bringing the food production to 26 million tons (1994) from 12 million tons (1976), in this way Vietnam has grown into the third largest rice-exporter of the world.

3. Nevertheless, after so many years of wars for national defense, Vietnamese women in general and the rural women in particular, are now faced with huge difficulties such as:

3.1. Lack of employment for women: Under-employment has given rise to low incomes, hard life and social vices, i.e. prostitution, gambling ... In the country, up to 3% of the rural women are completely unemployed, 50% under

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employed and 20% of the rural households living below poverty line. More and more women are leaving the rural areas for towns and cities to earn their living.

3.2. In the transition from the backward subsidized agricultural economy to a market economy, most rural women run short of capital and lack in experience in the new profile of production with farming household as a production unit instead of the former farming cooperative.

3.3. In the country, in the mountains and in the remote ethnic areas, there is a great lack in capable women to take part in the management of the community. In these regions, almost all the women do not yet know their rights and obligations.

3.4. The rate of literacy in Vietnam is considerably high, 88%. In the whole country, 12% of the population remain illiterate, mainly women and girls, and three-fourths of them living in the mountains. The rate of illiteracy among the ethnic groups is quite high, for instance 90% among the H'mong.

3.5. One of the gaps among the women's knowledge nowadays lies in the fact that most of them have no idea of the cultural and spiritual traditions as well as the physical heritage of the nation, are not conditioned for appreciation or expression of their love for the national culture or their awareness of the handing down of the traditions to the future generations. That many mothers do not know to sing folk songs or lullabies is not an uncommon phenomenon.

3.6. The war in Vietnam has come to an end for 20 years now, but its consequences on women are quite long-lasting. Today, in Vietnam, about 2 million people are victims of the war, women accounting for about half of them including 80-85% of them lonely, husbandless and/or childless women. This is the biggest disadvantage for the women and also a major social issue.

4. Governmental policy for education of women:

To meet the requirements of the socio-economic renovation of the nation, Vietnam is now implementing the reform of the educational system.

As for women, the objective of this reform is to raise their capabilities. In the educational systems, both formal and non-formal, the state has not only implemented the policy of equality between men and women but given priority to women and girls as well.

In the social aspect, the women perform 3 major functions: production, procreation and social activity. Certainly, they work harder than their male counterparts, therefore how to arrange their work that they may have sometime

for education and self-improvement is a problem that concerns not only themselves buteach family, each collective and the entire society as well.

Another important thing is that Vietnam not only attaches great importance to education of women but also encourages women to take an active part in education itself. These two aspects are quite interrelated and interacting.

II. CURRENT PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION FOR IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S CAPABILITIES IN VIETNAM.

1. Literacy Programme:

According to the statistical data of the 1989 population census, in Vietnam today, about 5,610,000 women remain illiterate, 88.7% of them living in the rural areas, particularly in the mountainous provinces. The National Assembly and Government of Vietnam have attached great importance to combating illiteracy among women. The objective of the campaign is to achieve literacy of the people of the 15-35 age bracket by the year 2000. From 1990 on, annually about 200.000 - 215.000 people are brought to literacy at a spending by the Government of approximately VND 20 billion per annum. Vietnam is a nation with rich experience in combating illiteracy, as this great undertaking has been carried on since September 1945 with numerous large-scale campaigns that yield a result of 15 million of literates.

2. Literacy Follow-up Programme:

Since 1993, the literacy follow-up programmes have been launches with an aim at consolidating the achievements of literacy, and raising the women's abilities to practise 3 R's with functional knowledge.

Preparation of the literacy follow-up materials and organization of follow-up courses, mainly for rural women , are two things of prime importance.

As for the materials, the National Literacy Commission has allotted funding for the formulation of literacy follow-up curriculum with the preparation of 2 follow-up materials for the learners to attain a level equivalent to formal primary education.

Quite a few governmental and non-governmental organizations and some provincial and municipal authorities for education and training have prepared various materials with contents covering such issues as protection of the environment, combating drug-abuse, prevention of AIDS, upbringing of children, credits, management of small enterprises, preservation of historical monuments

and legacy... The formation of literacy and follow-up courses in the rural areas is quite flexible. The classrooms may be at some private home; the learners may work together according to groups of households or go to class as usual.

Such international organizations and agencies as UNESCO, ASPBAE, ACCU, DVV.., have rendered very active supports to Vietnam in the implementation of the two programmes mentioned above.

3. Job-skill training programme.

Since the women can go to class only when they and their family members have got sufficient food, as the Vietnamese often put it "Food comes first to support Ethics", therefore, keen attention has been paid to raising women's incomes that they can afford to go to class. This orientation has been achieved by combining the programmes for literacy, follow-up learning and equivalent education of women with the job-skill training programme. This combined programme should be applied in a flexible manner in accordance with the real conditions of each locality. For instance, in the midlands and the mountains, women should be trained in occupations that may help them to give up self-sufficiency of food at any rate, persuading them to refrain from devastation of the forests, boldly changing the structure of production in the direction of protection of the forests available, promoting afforestation, combining forestry and farming...

In the localities with ponds and lakes available, insides the instruction on protection of the sources i.e. the floating fish-cage farming. Right now, throughout the land, there are about 16,000 cages of fish and quite a few women have made approximately VND 50 million per year (or about USD 5,000) from fish-farming.

For the time being, 42 Provincial Women's Unions have built centres for education and job-skill training of women, hence 46,800 women employed. Nationwide, 530 districts centres of continuing education are engaging in the literacy and training of women in job-skills.

Along with the job-skill training, the Vietnam Women's Union has organized and guided women to take loans from the Bank as capital to be invested in manufacturing and trading. The National Fund for Employment has actively helped women in overcoming economic difficulties.

4. Distance Education Programme.

The programme for distance education of women in generating incomes, improving the quality of life and preserving the national culture has been launched under the programme prepared by the Central Committee of the Vietnam Women's Union and Vietnam Radio and Television. On every Saturday afternoon, Vietnam Television broadcasts a programme of education for women and girls.

The programme for distance education of women under the programme of equivalent education undertaken by the colleges and centres for continuing education under the regulations enforced by Ministry of Education and Training has provided the women with good opportunities for learning.

III. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION IN VIETNAM.

1. Like so many other nations, Vietnam is step by step implementing the national policy for socialization of education. In the process, women play a major role in the formation of the personnality of the children at home.

The Vietnamese children often sing "At home, mother is also teacher; and at school the teacher is like gentle mother". This means, thanks to education, women may bring children physical and spiritual capabilities. The movement for bringing up healthy and clever children has commended a positive response from the women. The contests "Charming mother, healthy children", "Healthy and Clever Children"... have been held successfully in all the provinces.

2. In 1990, nationwide dropouts accounted for about 12% of the primary education children. This was a difficulty for the universalization of primary education by the year 2000. Since 1993, however, the movement "Women taking care of "dropouts" among children" has been launched by the Central Committee of Vietnam Women's Union in coordination with Ministry of Education and Training, and as a result, the percentage of "dropouts" has been on the decrease. This is of essential significance not only to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but also to helping to reduce the number of illiterates among adults in the future.

3. The Vietnamese women pay great attention to education of the young generation in the awareness of preserving and developing the traditions of material and spiritual culture of each ethnic nationality and each locality. In Vietnam today, there are 54 ethnic groups, and in each group the women are directly responsible for teaching their children in their national spirit, the preservation of fine customs and practices, songs and dances, fêtes and festivals,

costumes and delicacies. That's why, quite a few provinces are in a position to develop cultural tourism.

4. The women's participation in education is great. Women account for 71% of the total teachers in the educational sector: 100% in pre-school section, 76% in primary education, 66% in lower secondary schools, 47% in upper secondary schools and 32% in universities and colleges. To meet the requirements of the educational reform in the market economy, the women teachers are making every effort to achieve fine performance.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

For the Vietnamese women's monumental contributions to the fatherland and the family throughout the different periods of history, late president Ho Chi Minh put it that the Vietnamese women possess four noble virtues, i.e. Bravery, Indomitability, Kind-heartedness and Thrift. The Vietnamese are proud of their women. In fact, however, the Vietnamese women still suffer from more difficulties than men do.

Right after the August Revolution in 1945, the Vietnamese Government showed great concerns about the education of women, and today the concerns are even greater. The Vietnamese women are not only beneficiaries of education but they even take an active and effective part in the Vietnamese education itself.

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